

2 77

WORKING PAPER
ALFRED P. SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

THE NATURE AND VARIETY OF FLEXIBILITY IN MANAGERIAL JOBS

Rosemary Stewart

WP 1092-79

November 1979

MASSACHUSETTS
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
50 MEMORIAL DRIVE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

THE NATURE AND VARIETY OF FLEXIBILITY IN MANAGERIAL JOBS

Rosemary Stewart

WP 1092-79

November 1979

Rosemary Stewart BA, MSc, PhD
Fellow

Oxford Centre for Management Studies
Kennington, Oxford OX1 5NY
Telephone: Oxford 735422 (STD Code 0865)

Rosemary Stewart

A number of studies exist that describe job flexibility from particular perspectives, but no attempt has been made to identify either the kinds, or the variety of the opportunities that managerial jobs offer for jobholders to do them differently.

This paper describes how two recent studies in the U.K. can contribute to our understanding of the flexibility of managerial work, and the diversity of managerial behavior. The first study was of 98 managers in industrial and commercial companies. The second of 41 senior administrators in similar posts in the National Health Service in the U.K. Both used lengthy open-ended interviews, silent observation and group discussions.

The main conceptual framework for analysis, that of demands, constraints and choices is explained. A detailed classification of the factors determining the nature and amount of flexibility is given. Comparisons of the behavior of managers in similar jobs are used to illustrate the diversity of behavior that is possible both in content and method. The common and distinctive aspects of flexibility in jobs are described. The implications of flexibility for our understanding of managerial work and behavior are discussed.

The subject of this paper has received little attention either in the management literature or, more surprisingly, from researchers specifically concerned with managerial work or managerial behavior. There has been much more interest in organizational flexibility (Weick, 1979; Warner, 1977). There are writers who, from a number of different perspectives, have described particular aspects of job flexibility. The role-set model of Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) and the role-making systems of Graen (1976) envisage the individual influencing other's perceptions of what his role should be. These postulate flexibility in a job, and see it as a process of negotiating over time the nature of role expectations. Such an approach is related to the topic of this paper in its recognition of flexibility in jobs and in its emphasis on their dynamic nature, but it provides no guide to analysing the characteristics of flexibility in particular jobs. A different approach has been that of Hodgson, Levinson and Zaleznik (1965) and Senger (1971) who describe job sharing: the first of how the members of an executive team

developed specialized roles, the second of how the task and social roles were shared between superior and subordinate. Such job sharing, or role specialization, is, as we shall see later, an important aspect of job flexibility, particularly in some kinds of jobs. A career perspective can give a different view of job flexibility in which, as Katz (1979) has argued, the individual's attitude to his job and focus of attention changes over time and, by implication, the work that he actually does. Such an approach is important for a longitudinal view of job flexibility, but it is not the subject of this paper. Contingency theories of leadership are relevant because they focus on the constraints on opportunities for variations in leadership style, which is one of the ways in which jobholders can do their jobs differently. These different perspectives can help us to understand particular aspects of flexibility in managerial jobs, but none are concerned with describing either the varied nature of this flexibility, nor how managerial jobs differ in the nature of their flexibility, which are the purposes of this paper.

It is argued that an understanding of the nature and variety of flexibility in managerial jobs, that is the opportunities they offer for individuals to do them differently, is important for improving our understanding of both the nature and the diversity of managerial jobs. Such an undertaking is impossible as a total description because of the variety of dimensions involved, but even in the more limited and feasible analysis of particular forms of flexibility it can improve our understanding and help us to consider managerial jobs more realistically. If we can do that we shall improve both our theory and practical applications in selection, training for management and management development.

This paper describes what two recently completed studies, planned and supervised by the writer, can contribute both to our understanding of the nature of flexibility in managerial jobs, and of how jobs differ in the kinds of flexibility that they offer - the significance of the use of the word "offer" will be described later.

The approach was an exploratory and comparative one: comparing one job to another: jobs in the same function in different companies. and the behavior of managers in similar jobs.

The first, longer, and more theoretical study sought to classify the common and distinctive types of flexibility in different kinds of managerial jobs, that is the nature of the opportunities for jobholders in the same job to behave differently. This was a two and a half year study, funded by the Social Science Research Council in the U.K. Phil Long was the full-time research worker on the project for two years and carried out almost all the fieldwork.

The second, a commissioned study was of the nature of, and the training needs for, the post of District Administrator in the National Health Service in the U.K. This study was financed by a U.K. charity, the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London. The main study in 1979 took ten months including writing the final report, and was preceded by a short pilot. The report will later be published by the Fund.* The three part-time research workers were Peter Smith, Jenny Blake, and Pauline Wingate.

The first study had two fieldwork stages: one, a week's silent observation and interviews of six pairs of managers, making twelve weeks' observation in all. Each pair of managers was in a similar job, and each of the six jobs was different: plant manager in the metals industry, area sales manager and personnel manager in a consumer goods company in the chemical industry, service manager in an electronics company, maintenance manager in a large local authority and planning manager in another. The jobs, all at middle or upper middle management, were necessarily fairly well-defined because each had at least one similar pair. The purpose of this stage of the research was to compare the ways in which people in similar jobs might do them differently, so as to help in deciding what concepts to use for analysis, and what questions to include in the interviews.

*Stewart, R., Smith, P., Blake, J., and Wingate, P. The Role of the District-Administrator in the National Health Service, London, 2 Palace Court. W.2., 4 HS. King's Fund, Spring 1980.

The second fieldwork stage consisted of interviews with 98 managers, of an hour and a half to two hours, using a lengthy open-ended questionnaire, which, in addition to background information about the job and its organizational setting, explored in detail the jobholder's opportunities to influence or determine different stages of the work process, and other opportunities for the jobholder to do the job in his or her own way. Shorter interviews were also held with the manager's boss to ask about the opportunities in the job for one jobholder to behave differently from another. The latter interviews were tape-recorded.

The sample of 98 was of jobs rather than individuals. A job being a designated position in a company. The 98 jobs were selected to cover a wide range of functions. About half the sample was a cross-section by level and function of jobs in one division of a large chemical company, with the main emphasis on those at the middle and senior levels of management. The aim of matching this with a similar sample in another large company was not fully achieved because of the problems of enlisting cooperation within the period of the grant funding the research. However, a cross-section of middle and senior management jobs in marketing and finance in a large electronics company enabled cross comparisons to be made in these functions. The remainder of the sample consisted of varied management posts, predominantly middle and senior, in five other companies selected to include the main functions. The word 'manager' is used broadly for all those above a certain level. The jobs were graded in the companies as middle or senior management or those reporting directly to them, with the main sample consisting of middle and senior posts. These did contain some jobs that had no subordinates reporting to them, or only a secretary or assistant.

This paper is limited to the discussion of types of flexibility and of how jobs differ in the nature of their flexibility. Other findings will be discussed elsewhere. This will include a paper on what the evidence, limited by the constraints of the composition and size of the sample, can indicate about

the factors, company, function and level that are associated with different types of flexibility.

The second study is interesting for the topic of this paper for two reasons: one, it provided an application of the concepts used in the first study; two, it was an unusual opportunity to compare the behavior of a large number of senior managers in similar jobs thus giving an in-depth insight into a job that offers wide opportunities for jobholders to behave differently.

The District Administrator, the subject of the second study, is a senior post in the National Health Service created in a reorganization in 1974. There are about 200 such posts in England. Each is in charge of the administrative, institutional and support services for health services in hospitals and in the community in a geographical area.

The District Administrator is a member of, and responsible for the administrative coordination of, the consensus management team that is responsible for health services in the district. This team consists of three other functional officers: The District Community Physician, the District Nursing Officer and the District Finance Officer and two doctors' representatives, one for those in primary care and one for the specialists. The District Personnel Officer may also be a member of the team.

Our study consisted of lengthy open-ended interviews, lasting from three to seven hours with 41 District Administrators. We asked about their activities in each area of the job during the preceding month, and more generally what they saw as their role in each of these areas. We concluded with more general questions about the job.

The sample was carefully chosen to cover the District situations likely to affect the job of the District Administrator. The Districts in our sample ranged in size from a population of 132,000 to 518,000, from 5 to 32 hospitals and from 783 to 4100 beds. The numbers employed ranged from 2,000 to over 11,000.

In the second stage of the research eight DAS were observed for three days each so as to compare what they said about their work, and their view of their role, with our observations. The three days included a meeting of the District-Management Team. The eight were chosen to include those with apparently different approaches to the job, those who had held it since 1974 and those fairly recently appointed.

The main study was preceded by a pilot during which three District Administrators were observed for a week each, and they and the principal members of their role set were interviewed. This was followed by a one-day meeting with them and the researchers to discuss the design of the main study. The latter was followed by a 24-hour seminar to discuss the findings.

These two research studies provide the main source for this paper. This was supplemented by the information obtained during special courses run by the writer, which ranged from two-day to two-week programmes for managers from many different types of companies: all of them aimed at helping participants to identify the opportunities for flexibility in their jobs, and to become aware of the use that they currently made, and could make, of this flexibility. The exercises and group discussions that formed part of these programmes provided additional insight into the nature of flexibility in a wide range of jobs. The two-week programmes, attended by one hundred and fifty middle and senior managers from the large chemical company, which was part of the sample for the first study, helped to enlarge our understanding of the nature of the jobs in that company.

CONCEPTS FOR ANALYZING JOB FLEXIBILITY

The concepts for analysis had to meet the following requirements:

1. To apply to any kind of managerial job
2. To distinguish between flexibility in different jobs
3. To enable ^{one} to analyze the nature of flexibility in individual jobs

In the second study there was a further requirement:

4. That the concept(s) should be a useful guide for identifying management development needs

Both studies started with one conceptual framework from Stewart (1976), that of demands, constraints and choices. Demands being defined as the activities that anybody in the job must do, that is cannot avoid doing without invoking sanctions that would imperil continuing in the job. The 'demands' can be seen as the minimum core of the job. Constraints are the factors internal and external to the organization that limit what the jobholder can do. Choices are the flexibility in the job, that is the opportunities for one jobholder to do different work from another. These choices are limited by both the demands and the constraints, though these are seen as dynamic, permitting of some change over time arising from changes in the situation and from the action of the jobholder; one of whose choices may be to try and change the demands, or, more likely, the constraints. This paper is only concerned with the demands, constraints and choices in a job, not with those that may also pertain to the individual in the job.

It is the idea of demands, constraints and choices as together giving a dynamic picture of the job, and one that helps to highlight the flexibility available to the jobholder that is distinctive about the concept. The idea of constraints and demands is used by Graen (1976) in discussing the determinants of roles, though neither are defined. The word 'choice' has a long-established use in the decision-making literature, which is different from that used here, which is why the word 'flexibility' is used in this paper as the general term, although 'choices' is retained when using the concept, demands, constraints and choices.

This concept provided the starting point for the first study; a useful way of conceiving of the nature of flexibility in jobs. It could meet the first requirement listed above, and, but only in a very broad way, the second. This left a need in the first study for a more concrete way of meeting the second and third requirements.

Glover's (1977) criticism of research into managerial work as not paying

enough attention to the actual work that is done and to its outputs provided a stimulus for adopting the framework used for the more detailed analysis. Glover had said:

"The output of various types of 'managerial work,' which ought to have been seen as their main distinguishing feature, had not concerned many writers. Most of the relatively few studies reviewed had not focused directly on output...determination of the kind of output had hardly been studied at all." p. 277

This criticism together with the insights from comparing the behavior of the pairs of managers in stage one of the first study, and the six jobs themselves suggested the desirability of considering a job as a work flow process. This would enable one to analyze the nature of the flexibility, that is the opportunities for the jobholder to influence or determine, the input of work to the job, the conversion process and the output. This limited use of the systems approach, which drew on the work of Miller & Rice (1967) & Scholefield (1968) was adopted in the first study as a way of asking the jobholder about his job, and the opportunities for flexibility inherent in it. It helped to focus on the actual work being done and from where it originated. It proved useful as a way of tackling the second and third requirement, but was less important in the study of the District Administrator where a much more in-depth understanding of the job was acquired. In that study it was possible to develop a detailed description of the demands, constraints and choices in the job, which satisfied the fourth requirement.

The phrase 'the opportunities that the job offers' was used at the start of this paper. It is important for understanding the nature of the flexibility in a job. The argument of this paper is, and all our evidence would support it, that managerial jobs, and other responsible jobs, offer opportunities for the individual jobholder to do different kinds of work and to do it in different ways.

The concept of demands, constraints and choices envisage the latter as an

area that can be thought of both in spatial terms, and as a number of possibilities that can vary in their kind, number, and dimensions. The concept posits that the opportunities that a job offers, the area of potential choice, cannot be fully used by any one individual. The reasons for that are: time: in most, managerial jobs, this is a real constraint, so that, even with the elasticity of what can be done in a particular time, and in working hours, there is an element of finding time for one activity rather than another; some activities are real alternatives, if one does one, one cannot do the other; the individual's knowledge and abilities constrain his or her use of the possibilities and so does the personal dynamics of the role set.

This description of the flexibility in jobs is not meant to imply a static view, even though statements will be made about the kinds of flexibility that exist in particular jobs. It is possible to make such broad statements while recognizing that the nature of the flexibility may change because of situational changes affecting the job, and for a particular jobholder over time, as Graen's (1976) role-making system describes and as Katz (1978) has argued in his longitudinal view of job tenure. Despite these reservations about describing the nature of the flexibility in a particular job, without including a time dimension, it is still both possible and useful for a better understanding of the job to do so, as we found in the study of the District Administrators.

The description that follows of different kinds of flexibility cannot, of course, be an exhaustive one; jobs are too complex for that. It is a distillation of what seemed to us to be most distinctive and important in terms of the amount of flexibility, but such a distillation is necessarily constrained by the concepts used and the assumptions made about what is distinctive and important.

CLASSIFYING THE NATURE AND VARIETY OF FLEXIBILITY IN MANAGERIAL JOBS

The classification that follows was developed inductively by comparing: one job with another, based on the descriptions of the jobholders and their

bosses; jobs at the same function and level in different companies; and the behavior of managers in similar jobs. The first part of the classification could possibly have been developed deductively, but it is easier to see how this could have been done after going through the inductive process. The aim has been to produce a classification that applies to any kind of managerial job. It can be used to analyze differences in jobs and in behavior.

One major division in the classification is a commonly recognized distinction between content and method, that is between what work is done and how it is done. This is a convenient distinction for identifying both differences in jobs and in behavior. However, the distinction is not clear-cut; for example, the meetings attended can be seen both as content and as method.

The other major division in the classification is between the opportunities for the manager to influence or determine the work done by his or her unit (the word chosen to cover section, department, branch, division, works, company, etc.) and the other work in which he or she must, or can choose to, be involved. We found that this unusual distinction helped in identifying differences both in jobs and in behavior. A distinction can also be made for a manager who is not in charge of a unit between the key tasks of the job and other possible work.

The concept of a work-flow process, consisting of inputs, conversion and output has been used to help in analyzing the flexibilities that the manager has in the management of his or her unit. The classification seeks to identify the demands and constraints that can limit the manager's flexibility at each stage. The classification starts with outputs rather than, as it may seem more logically, with inputs because we found the former were usually more important in determining the nature and extent of the flexibility available.

I - Classification of Flexibility in What Work is Done

IA The Manager's Unit or Key Tasks of the Job for a Manager Without a Unit

I AI Output Specification

The tighter the output specification the less opportunity that the jobholder has to determine what work is done, when it is done and how. The factors that are relevant are:

Specification of the nature of output

This can range from, at one extreme, very precise specifications of the volume, size, quality and cost of, say, tin cans, to, at the other a very broad and largely unquantifiable description of objectives. Specification by profit targets comes towards the flexible end of the range.

Specification of timing of output

Frequency, e.g., weekly, monthly

Flexibility, if any, in this timing

Opportunities to influence output specifications

I A.2 Output Acceptance

In some staff jobs, such as training manager, the willingness of other managers to accept the output can be a real constraint upon what the manager can do, although a constraint that may in time, at least partially, be overcome.

I A.3 Input Control and Reliability

The tighter the definition and timing of the output the more it will matter to the jobholder whether he or she can rely on, or if not, can influence inputs of what is needed. The relevant factors are:

Nature of inputs

- extent of influence/control possible
- predictability of supply in forms wanted

Timing of Inputs

- predictability
- control over timing

This was one of the areas where some of our managers chose to be proactive by either seeking to prevent any threats to the stability of their unit or to ensure more flexibility in the work that was done. An example of the former was one of the two service managers, whom we observed, who tried to ensure that the sales department did not make any promises that would later cause trouble for his service engineers. An example of the latter was the retail chain store manager who sought to become known as a good store to try out new lines, so that they

would get them first.

I A.4 Constraints on Conversion

The more that managers can use the resources they want, in the ways they want, the more flexibility that they will have. The less they have to conform to organizational policies and procedures, the greater the freedom to manage their unit as they wish. The more a manager can act as he or she wishes without needing to consider the reactions of others, again the more flexibility that there will be.

This area is less easy to compare across jobs because of the wide variety of constraints that can be relevant, but the main headings are:

Resources: The extent to which the jobholder can determine or influence the quantity, quality and use of resources for his unit, distinguishing between people, money, equipment, buildings and materials. Any one of these has, as we found, many ramifications so simple comparisons are not possible.

Systems, union and legal constraints

The extent to which legislation, union agreements, policies and procedures, including computer programs, constrain what can be done.

Technological constraints

Attitudinal constraints

The extent to which use of resources and changes in the work done are constrained by attitudes.

Delegation

The extent to which the jobholder is limited in the amount of delegation and in what is delegated. The factors that are relevant include the following:

- knowledge, experience and information access of subordinates
- work pressures on subordinates
- subordinates' attitudes to delegation
- their geographical location
- whether the manager needs to coordinate subordinates' work
- attitudes of seniors to what jobholder should do and know
- what else there is for the jobholder to do, this very important point is illustrated later.

I.B Work Possibilities Outside the Manager's Own Unit

So far we have been classifying the demands and constraints that will affect

the nature and amount of flexibility that a manager will have in managing his or her own unit. Our study also highlighted the importance in some jobs for understanding the work opportunities that exist outside the manager's unit. This was shown most vividly in the observation of managers in similar jobs.

We considered two ways of classifying these work possibilities: one, by the contacts that the job permits or requires and the opportunities that are thus available, the other by whether the activities were primarily individual ones: dyads, requiring the cooperation of one other person; or activities performed in a group. We chose the latter because it can more easily show the skills that are needed and the opportunities that are likely to appeal to different personalities.

I. B.1 Individual Activities

1.1 Special Expertise

An opportunity existed in a small number of very different kinds of jobs that we studied for the jobholder to either develop a special expertise, or to use existing expertise, in ways other than normally expected of the jobholder. From the individual's point of view this had the advantage of providing a different sort of work interest and possibly of conferring a higher status.

1.2 Information from Outside the Organization

The Technical Gate Keeper role (Allen, 1966) is particularly relevant to professional posts in management as well as to R and D. But any job that permits or requires external contacts offers some possibility for the individual to choose to emphasize or not the collection of information, what Mintzberg (1973) called the Liaison role.

1.3 Public Relations

This is also an activity that some jobs require, such as branch bank managers, and many general managers, where the flexibility for the individual is in the emphasis that is given to doing so. In a smaller number of jobs there is a choice for the individual as to whether he takes part in public relations or

not. There may be more jobs offering such a choice in the U.K., where less importance is sometimes attached to public relations, than in the U.S.A.

1.4 Community Work within working hours

The opportunities for this will vary both with the culture of the company; some encourage it in principle, other do not, and with the particular job. In our study of two personnel managers in the same company we found that one spent a day a week on such work and the other spent no time at all. In some other jobs in that company it would in practice have been unacceptable to take such time, even though it was officially encouraged.

The last three headings have been about work outside the organization. It should be recognized that external contacts can provide a completely new dimension to a job. This, we found, was most likely to be used and appreciated by those who had been in their job for some time. Once they had got their unit running to their satisfaction, so that, as one general manager of a subsidiary division put it, "only fine tuning remains to be done" they may wish for other outlets for their energies. A general manager's job can offer a wide variety of such outlets. More constrained jobs may do so, too, such as that of the retail chain store manager. Such flexibility may be particularly important in avoiding boredom in long-term job tenure in those jobs that offer little or no opportunity for lateral contacts within the organization. The latter, as we shall see, can be a fertile source of job flexibility.

Contacts outside the organization open up opportunities that will often be less constrained than internal contacts by the jobholder's internal role-set. They can therefore provide additional job flexibility for those whose lack of political skills may reduce their opportunities for active lateral involvement.

1 B.2 Dyad Activities Within the Organization

These can be seen either as different forms of job sharing, or more appropriately in some situations as expansion into the domain of a colleague. One example of the former is to try and get more or less involved in the boss's work. This is

the reverse of delegation discussed earlier, but it can be a choice for the subordinate as well as for the boss. We found that this opportunity was most marked in the marketing jobs in the large chemical company, probably because the distinction between the work at different levels in marketing was less clear than in other functions.

It is probable that the opportunities for sharing work with one's boss, which can mean delegation upwards, as well as encouraging greater delegation downwards, is limited to boss-dependent jobs. The concept of boss-dependence in jobs was described by Stewart (1976) as whether, and if so the extent to which, the nature of the job was dependent upon the boss.

Jobs vary, we found, in the extent to which they are separate from those in other functions. At one extreme there is little or no opportunity to get involved in the work of colleagues. This is generally true of managers in charge of physically separate units, particularly if they are in highly formalized organizations, like retail chain store managers, branch bank managers or the maintenance managers in a large local authority whom we observed. At the other extreme there are two types of jobs: those like management, accounting or personnel which can, depending upon the constraints of the structure and attitudes, offer considerable flexibility in the nature and extent of such involvement; and those that are fellow members of some management teams. Both examples are more illuminatingly described as the opportunity to move into another's domain, rather than as job sharing. One constraint will be the attitudes of the colleague to such involvement. Kotter and Lawrence (1974) have a useful discussion of domain in their study of mayors, which they describe as the area within which the job-holder acts as if he is responsible.

I B.3 Group Activities Within the Organization

Jobs differ in whether, and if so the extent to which, they require or permit participation in groups. Managers in charge of separate units may not, depending upon the organization, have any opportunities to participate in group

activities. It can be argued that the more opportunities that a job provides for different group participation the more opportunities exist for the manager to choose the extent to which, and within the constraints of his own personality and that of other group members, the ways in which he contributes.

One major opportunity offered in some jobs is that of participating in the management of a larger unit, that is the unit of which the manager's boss is the head, or for the District Administrator, which is the joint responsibility of members of the management team. The extent to which an individual is interested in this wider perspective and wants to get actively involved can, our observations show, differ greatly.

In some organizations, particularly those with a matrix structure, there will be many cross-functional meetings. Some of these will be demands, but even so they provide opportunities for differences both in the extent and the nature of participation. Others, including ad hoc working parties, may offer a choice of whether to be a member or not.

II. Classification of Flexibility in How Work is Done

We have found that jobs differ, and the behavior of individuals in similar jobs differs, in the following three areas. Additionally there are differences in leadership style but these are not considered here as they have been extensively studied.

II.1 Pattern of Work

Mintzberg (1973) said that managerial work was characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation, and from his observations of five chief executives that managers preferred live action. Such generalizations were a useful corrective to descriptions of managerial work, which suggested a calmer, more planned existence, but they are, our studies show, misleading, as they ignore both the diversity in the patterns of jobs, shown in Stewart (1976), and the wide variation in the ways in which some managers do their jobs as we found in the two studies reported here. The factors that are relevant to the amount of flexibility are:

Availability

Who the manager needs to be available to and when. This will depend upon the incidence of urgent problems, and whether the manager is the only person who can deal with them, as well as upon the expectations that have developed about the manager's availability and how far it is possible to change these expectations.

Meetings

The extent to which the manager has to attend meetings, and whether he or she has any say in their timing, frequency and duration.

Travelling

As for meetings.

Time Deadlines

Whether the manager has to work to time deadlines that are not self-imposed. Predictability and frequency of these deadlines.

II.2 Methods of Contact

There are two main distinctions that we noted in the methods of contact: the formality or informality; and the numbers involved, that is the proportion of contacts that are with one other person, with two others or in small or large groups. Formality of contacts has two aspects: whether contacts are pre-arranged or ad hoc and if pre-arranged whether they have agendas and minutes or are otherwise formally structured. All managers, as far as we have been able to tell, will have some choice in whether they talk to people individually or prefer to have at least one other person present. The number of meetings that are a demand of the job will constrain the extent of this choice.

All jobs in some companies seem to offer little choice in the formality or informality of contacts. This may apply to all contacts, or only to contacts outside the manager's own unit. The culture may, and in several of the companies where we were studying did, enforce informality of contacts. For the maintenance managers in a large local authority the culture had the opposite effect. Contacts with people in the organization outside his own unit were formal and many were not permitted at all, thus severely constraining the opportunities for lateral contacts.

11.3 Use of Verbal or Written Information

Many jobs offer at least some flexibility here, although some are necessarily, particularly in many production management jobs, overwhelmingly verbal. Mintzberg (1973) said that managers prefer verbal information. This was also a useful generalization because it helped to give a more realistic picture of how many managers work than that obtained from advocates of management information systems. Again our observations show that there are differences in what managers choose to do.

FUNCTION AND LEVEL AS GUIDES TO THE AMOUNT AND NATURE OF FLEXIBILITY

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss what our limited evidence can tell us about this. Even so it is important, for understanding the complexity of managerial jobs, to point out that we found that jobs in the same function, at the same level and in the same company can have differing amounts--in so far as this could be judged by our methods--and somewhat different kinds of flexibility. This was especially true of engineering jobs in the large chemical company, but also of many other jobs including those in marketing in several of the companies.

CONTRASTING EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBILITY IN JOBS

We shall take two examples from our observations of the behavior of managers in similar jobs and from our analysis of these jobs in terms of demands, constraints and choices. The first example is that of a plant manager in charge of one production stage in steel manufacture. This is chosen because it is a common job that transcends national boundaries and, more importantly, because there are severe demands and constraints that limit the manager's choices in managing his plant. We shall use this job to help in identifying what aspects of flexibility remain and to see whether these are likely to be common to other jobs. The second example is that of the District Administrator in the National Health Service in the U.K. This is chosen both because it offers its incumbent wide flexibility in what is done and how it is done, and because we have more comparative information on be-

havior than for any of the other posts studied. Although this post is a particular one that is not found outside the U.K., it can be used to illustrate different forms of flexibility, which are also found in other and common types of jobs.

Both plant managers who were each observed for a week, as well as interviews being held with them and their bosses, worked for the same organization and were in charge of the same process in different, and comparable, plants. They were both constrained in the management of their unit by output targets for volume, quality and cost of the product, and by weekly production targets. There were constraints common to many large organizations over the acquisition of supplies, although there was some flexibility in determining the quality of raw materials and in contacting suppliers of equipment. Amongst the constraints at the conversion stage, that is in the manufacture, were the nature of the equipment used, company personnel policies and union agreements and attitudes.

The only opportunities that the plant managers had for work outside their unit was attendance at the works manager's meetings and occasional working parties. These gave an additional dimension to the job not available in those posts where such participation is not invited. Our two plant managers differed in their perspective: one was only concerned with his own unit, the other took an interest in problems of the works as a whole and so made a different contribution to the meetings and was also more involved in liaison with the manager of the next production stage. Both managers could, of course, attend professional meetings in their own time, and both chose to do so.

The most important constraint on their flexibility in the pattern of their day was the number of meetings that they had to attend, otherwise they had flexibility in when they chose to tour the works and to some extent in how available they were. They also had choice in how far they fragmented their own activities. The opportunities for flexibility that the plant managers had that

we found are common to most other managerial jobs were the:

- relative emphasis given to different objectives, an example for the plant managers was cost compared with quality.
- emphasis given to particular parts of the job: one plant manager, for example, was much more interested in technical innovation than the other.
- amount of delegation and what was delegated, though the plant manager's job had a number of distinctive constraints upon delegation, which included attendance at many meetings, and the need to spend at least some time on coordinating the work of their immediate subordinates.
- leadership style, including attitudes to participation; one of the plant managers went further than company policy on this.
- pattern of the day, outside the constraints mentioned earlier, and two other opportunities for choice that apply to a more limited range of jobs:
- time spent touring the works (there are equivalents outside production jobs) and the reasons for which this was done, such as the relative importance attached to technical monitoring, relations with the work force and anticipation of possible problems.
- attitude towards the service engineers (again there are parallels in other jobs); one of the plant managers tried to make them feel part of the production team, the other treated them as people on whose services he had a right to call.

The plant managers also had a little flexibility in their methods of contact. Most of their information was obtained from conversation and from production reports and recordings, so that they did not have much choice between the time spent on verbal and written information.

The post of District Administrator offers many more opportunities for one jobholder to behave differently from another. We shall look first at the opportunities for choice in the management of the services for which the District Administrator is responsible. The District Administrator, unlike the plant manager, does not operate to set targets, but rather has to ensure that services are provided that are acceptable to doctors, nurses and patients, and has to do this within the constraints of the available resources. The most striking aspect

of flexibility was in the opportunities for delegation. Some District Administrators that we studied were actively involved in the management of their unit and spent most of their time with their subordinates. Others, at the opposite extreme, delegated all the operational work to one, two or three senior subordinates, and spent little time with their subordinates. They tended to have a few formal meetings with their immediate subordinates, and occasional individual discussions. This wide variation in the relative emphasis given to work with subordinates, and in the time spent with them is also, we found, true of many other management jobs that offer alternative work opportunities. It is not confined to senior management posts, though the opportunities for almost complete delegation will usually be greater there. Such opportunities are liable to vary with the competence and experience of subordinates and with the jobholder's familiarity with their work.

The District Administrators had great flexibility in the use that they made of two of the opportunities for primarily individual work that we listed in our classification: that of getting information from outside the organization and public relations. They had considerable choice in their range of external contacts, in the time that they spent with them and in the role that they were playing when they did so. Some believed in attending, and did attend, many external meetings. Some attached far more importance than others to public relations. One of them was known in the District as Mr. Health because of the importance that he attached to public visibility. Some of the others preferred to leave as many external contacts as they could to an immediate subordinate and to other members of the District Management Team.

Another opportunity for one District Administrator to do different work from another was in whether, and if so the extent to which they got involved in the work of individual colleagues. Some worked closely with one or more of the other officers; some paired with the District Finance Officer working

closely together on District problems; some, especially those who thought that the District Nursing Officer was not doing the job adequately, got involved, when the other would let them, in many of the problems of nursing in the District. The District Administrators also varied widely in whether, and if so, the extent to which they sought to establish close personal contacts with the doctors, particularly those acting as medical representatives on the District Management Team. We found somewhat similar opportunities for lateral involvement in a top management team of a subsidiary company.

The attention that the District Administrators gave to the work of the District Management Team varied widely, so did the role that they played in it. This is a common example of the different opportunities offered by membership of a management team, even though the consensus character of the team probably gave greater flexibility. The District Administrator's post gave him or her more opportunity than other team members to try and influence the frequency and duration of some of the meetings.

The attendance at meetings both regular and ad hoc, over a five week period, reported by the 41 District Administrators gives a striking and concrete example of the different ways in which they used their time, and the importance that they attached by so doing to different activities and contacts. There may be some lack of comparability in the figures, but our observations confirm that they give a valid picture of the differences in behavior, which can only, partially, be explained by differences in the District. The District Administrator who spent most time in meetings recorded attending 23 regular meetings taking 65 1/2 hours during the five week period and 20 ad hoc meetings totalling 36 3/4 hours. The District Administrator who spent the least time during the same five week period attended 5 regular meetings taking 11 1/4 hours and 2 ad hoc meetings taking 7 hours. Nor do these two examples represent isolated extremes. The Administrators who attended a lot of different kinds of meetings could be attending mainly internal

meetings, or, more likely, a wide variety of external meetings as well. The possible links between the work of the health services in the District and other bodies mean that there are many such meetings that the District Administrator could choose to attend or to initiate.

The post of District Administrator provided an unusually wide, but from our study of varied industrial and commercial management jobs by no means unique, range of flexibility in the time spent with different categories of contacts, in the activities with them and in the roles that could be played. One way of describing the great variations in how the District Administrators spent their time and in the work they did is to point to the differences in their focus of attention. The variations in this focus could not be adequately explained by differences in the situation of the Districts in which they worked, nor by the characteristics of other members of their role set, although the latter was some constraint upon their choices of activity.

Some District Administrators focused predominantly on the management of the services for which they were responsible. Our studies suggest that the amount of delegation is a product not merely of supervisory style, but of the focus of attention, that is what else the jobholder considers important and/or wants to do. Some District Administrators were far more concerned with the work of the District Management Team. Yet others were more focused on external work though even then there were considerable differences in the nature of their contacts and the role that they sought to play.

In all the jobs that we studied there were at least, even in the most constrained, some opportunities for differences in the focus of attention. In the post of retail chain store manager the differences are broadly between staff management, merchandising and administration. In the plant manager's job they include staff management, and the opportunities for different focuses within that; technical innovation; cost control; and what can broadly be called boundary

management, such as attention given to supplies and to establishing good relations with the service engineers. Neither the post of retail chain store manager nor, though to a lesser extent, that of plant manager, are boss dependent jobs. In jobs that are there is another possible focus of attention, that of managing the boss. Some of the managers that we interviewed sought to ensure that their boss treated them so that they were left free to run their own unit without his interference.

The two service managers whom we observed, who worked for a U.S. owned electronics company, had in many ways the most constrained jobs that we studied yet even they illustrate this difference in focus of attention. One thought politically and was concerned to ensure that no one in the organization outside his unit did anything that could interfere with its smooth running; boundary management but viewed more politically than the plant manager. The other focused his attention almost wholly within his unit, and on what he could do within it to improve its efficiency.

The District Administrators had great flexibility in their methods of working as well as in the content of what they did. They, in common with many senior managers, had considerable choice in how they organized their day, and in the extent to which they fragmented their work and encouraged others to come to them. Some of our District Administrators worked in closed offices with Private on the door. Access was guarded by a secretary and meetings with others were usually pre-arranged. At the opposite extreme were District Administrators who bounced in and out of their often open office, and were readily accessible to frequent telephone calls and personal callers. They were the ones who preferred what Mintzberg called "live action." The first type had long periods alone and uninterrupted for reading, preparing for meetings and writing position papers. The latter group had few periods of any length alone and uninterrupted. They took home the work that required more concentration. The first group delegated

operational work to their subordinates. The latter group joined with them in sorting out problems as they arose.

Our observations of pairs of managers did not yield such extreme examples of different work patterns probably because they were less senior and had less flexibility. Preparation for meetings and long-term planning also formed a much smaller part of their jobs, but there was still apart from the service managers, who worked in an open plan office, some flexibility for them in how they patterned their day and in the extent of fragmentation. It is primarily, perhaps wholly, by studying managers in similar jobs that it is possible to discover this aspect of flexibility. It will also probably vary in different company, and perhaps national cultures.

IMPLICATIONS OF FLEXIBILITY

These can be looked at first broadly for the relevance of flexibility to our understanding of the nature of managerial work and of managerial behavior; then for the implications and from different perspectives the organization's and the individual's for particular subjects, such as management training.

Our conclusion is that to understand what managerial jobs are really like one must understand the nature of their flexibility as well as the core demands. There are, as we have shown, some forms of flexibility that are common to many managerial jobs, and some, such as emphasizing one aspect of the job more than another, that are universal. But there are important differences too, in the opportunities that managerial--and other responsible--jobs offer for one jobholder to behave differently from another. We need, therefore, to be more cautious about generalizing about managerial work and more aware of the many exceptions to our generalizations.

The opportunities for individual managers to do what they believe to be most important for the job, the organization, or their own ambition, or what they find interesting and enjoyable, and, within the constraints of the structure and

culture of their organization, to choose their own style of working: formal or informal, fragmented or less fragmented, predominantly verbal or relying more on formal information, exist to a greater or lesser extent in all management jobs. Those who abhor the existence of such flexibility may try to prevent it, but even though they may succeed in limiting some forms of flexibility, such as informal lateral contacts, there are many others that will continue to exist.

These opportunities are not just theoretical ones that managers do not take in practice. Our observations of managers in similar jobs show that their focus of attention differed, and that for all of them this led to some differences in the work done, and in the least constrained job to much of the time being spent in different work and with different people. We found, too, that the methods of working, including the pattern of work and the methods of contact, also differed although the culture of the company could be more of a constraint here than the nature of the job. There seems no reason to assume that such variety of behavior is peculiar to British managers, who were the ones studied, and will not be found amongst American managers, although there may be some differences in cultural constraints. The lesson for our understanding of managerial behavior is, as with managerial work, that we must be much more cautious about generalizing about it. The generalizations made by Mintzberg (1973) about managerial work and behavior were a useful corrective to previous generalizations, but with the evidence of these new studies, we have reached a stage in our knowledge where we can, and should become more discriminating in our analysis.

The implications of flexibility in jobs can be looked at from the perspective of the organization and from that of the individual. In considering the implications for particular subjects we shall start from the organizational perspective moving gradually - since there is no clear dividing line to that of the individual.

Organizational Design

The way in which the organization is structured, and the extent of formalization will affect the nature and amount of flexibility in jobs. This is not a new finding, but the classification given earlier enables one to consider which factors are likely to be affected by different designs. One aspect of design that makes important differences to the kind of flexibility available is the existence of separate self-contained units. It often reduces the opportunities for lateral contacts and the flexibility that those can give in the kind of work that a jobholder does, but it also usually means more independence from interference by others. Such jobs seem to provide considerable satisfaction for the right individuals, but are less likely to suit those who are politically minded, as they may not have enough scope for such activity.

Job Design

The amount and kinds of autonomy in a job are commonplaces of those interested in job design, but their attention has been on the lower level jobs. The analysis in this paper can help one to look at the nature of flexibility in different managerial jobs.

Management Effectiveness

The different focuses of attention of individual managers and of members of management teams mean that it is important to look for the gaps that may be left. This is not to argue for a more restrictive approach, but for a clearer recognition of the possible gains and losses of the differences in individual behavior and for a consideration of whether something can and should be done to compensate for any gaps in the work that needs doing and for missing focuses of attention.

Selection

The implications of flexibility are to emphasize what is already known, but often not sufficiently considered, that in selecting someone for a post one needs

to consider not only the qualifications and experience, but also what aspects of the job he or she is likely to pay most attention to. This needs to be paralleled by a consideration of the needs of the particular job at that time, so that the choices that the individual is likely to take are matched to those that the job needs.

Education and Training

The ways in which jobs differ in the flexibilities that they offer is a guide to what a manager in a particular kind of job - 'kind' in terms of the nature of the flexibilities - needs to know. For example, the greater the output specification, the less there is any scope for strategic planning and policy making; in a job with many lateral contacts it is useful to have an understanding of political skills.

There are training implications for team members to help them to review what individually and collectively they tend to focus upon, and to consider what gaps this may leave both in content and process.

Individuals can be helped to recognize the distinctive characteristics of their own approach to the job and the extent to which much of what they do is a choice: someone else in the job might do it differently, not just because they have different talents, but because their focus of attention is different. Individual managers can also be helped to realize that there are fewer demands upon them and fewer constraints than they thought, hence more opportunity for them to consider how they want to do the job. One of the functions of a mentor, or the manager's boss, should be to help the individual to recognize and make fruitful use of the opportunities that exist.

Long-Term Job Tenure

This is a potential problem in some mature companies both for the individual and for the company which wishes its managers to stay alert and interested. Some, perhaps many, individuals will find their own ways of adapting to long periods in

the same job if they are in jobs that offer opportunities for work outside the organization or across functional boundaries; others may need help to do so. From the organization's point of view it is likely to be better if the individual makes use of opportunities within the job, rather than seeks to compensate for dullness at work only in his private life. Sometimes it will be possible for the company to provide fresh opportunities for the jobholder without moving him or her to a different job.

Individual Career Decisions

The individual needs to think both about what flexibilities he or she will value, and what ones are likely to give him or her the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities and to further their ambitions. In considering a career move they should think about what different opportunities for choice the new job offers.

An implication both for the individual and for the organization is that different kinds of flexibility appeal to different people and are, therefore, an important aspect of a job's characteristics.

FUTURE RESEARCH

A broad, and unquantified, classification of flexibility in managerial jobs has been presented. It offers innumerable opportunities for others to explore, even to measure--but it is hoped only with due respect for the complexity of human behavior and the diversity of managerial work--particular forms of flexibility, as well as to identify others not portrayed here.

REFERENCES

- Allen, T.J. Performance of communication channels in the transfer of technology. Industrial Management Review, 8 (Fall), 87-98.
- Glover, I.A. Managerial work: A review of the evidence. Unpublished report, London: City University, 1977. (also a doctoral thesis)
- Graen, G. Role-making processes within complex organizations, In M.D. Dunnette (Ed.), Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976.
- Hodgson, R.C., Levinson, D.J., and Zaleznik, A. The executive role constellation: An analysis of personality and role relations in management. Boston: Harvard Business School, Division of Research, 1965.
- Kahn, R.L., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R.P., Snoek, J.D., and Rosenthal, R.A. Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity. New York: Wiley, 1964.
- Katz, R. Job longevity as a situational factor in job satisfaction. Administrative Science Quarterly, 1978, 23, 204-223.
- Katz, R. Time and work: Towards an integrative factor in job satisfaction. In Review of Research in Organizational Behavior, B. Staw and L.L. Cummings (Eds.), JAI Press, 1979.
- Kotter, J.P. and Lawrence P. Mayors in action: Five studies in urban governance. New York: Wiley, 1974.
- Miller, E.J., and Rice, A.K. Systems of organization: The control of task and sentient boundaries. London: Tavistock, 1967.
- Mintzberg, H. The nature of managerial work. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Scholefield, J. The Effectiveness of Senior Executives, Journal of Management Studies, May, 1968, 219-234.
- Senger, J. The co-manager concept. California Management Review, Spring 1971, 13, 71-83.
- Stewart, R. Contrasts in management: A study of different types of managers' jobs, their demands and choices. London, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Warner, M. (Ed.), Organizational choice and constraints: Approaches to the sociology of enterprise behavior. England: Saxon House, 1977.
- Weick, K.E. The social psychology of organizing. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969.

amr

amr

mmmm

mmmm

mmmm

SEP 1 1986

APR 0 3 '88

JUL 17 '87

MAR 11 1989

AUG 14 '87

MAY 28 1987

ACME
BOOKBINDING CO., INC.

SEP 6 1993

100 CAMBRIDGE STREET
CHARLESTOWN, MASS..

HD28.M414 no.1088- 79
Keen, Peter G/Decision support system
737947 D×BKS 00136576



3 9080 002 042 890

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 524 408

HD28.M414 no.1090- 79
Bullen, Christ/Distributed processing
737951 D×BKS 00136577



3 9080 002 042 924

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 524 424

HD28.M414 no.1092- 79
Stewart, Rosem/The nature and variety
737941 D×BKS 00131990



3 9080 001 988 473

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 524 440

MIT LIBRARIES



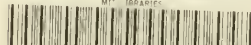
3 9080 004 584 162

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 493 380

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 493 406

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 493 422

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 493 448

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 524 309

MIT LIBRARIES



3 9080 004 581 796

1097-80

1098

←1089-79

1099-80

←1091-79

1100-80

1093-79

1094-79

1095

1096-79

